



How Do We Want to Exercise Leadership?

Overview: Having people review their visions of leadership can be a compelling way to help them critically reflect on power and gender as well as their own leadership styles and the need for changes in their approaches and in those of women leaders in general.

Purpose: This exercise is used to visualize how people understand leadership and what it looks like in their communities and organizations. Using a series of drawings, it provides a creative way to unpack the ideas that we have internalized about what a good leader is and how she acts. It allows people to begin to question their own views without getting defensive and opens them up to new leadership approaches. The activity can be revisited at different moments of a training process to see the changes that occur in people's ideas and perceptions. It can be used in conjunction with a variety of other exercises such as the Mural of Mentors and Ancestors and other activities on power and gender so participants can see the influence of sexism and other power dynamics on women's leadership. There are three options provided at the end to deepen the process.

Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Credit: Adapted by Mariela Arce with Patricia Ardon for the Mesoamerican Alquima program

Materials and Space Needed:

- Sheets of paper
- Markers or different-colored crayons
- Masking tape
- Wall or surface to hang up the drawings



WERISE-TOOLKIT.ORG





Process:

In Plenary:

- Introduce the exercise as a form of reflection and collective learning about leadership and explain the actual process – that everyone will be making a drawing to illustrate their ideas about leadership, followed by a discussion.

Facilitation Note: You should refrain from giving away too many details that would influence participants' responses in the drawings. The idea is to explore, as honestly as possible without any preconceived notions, what people in the group think about leadership, where they get their ideas about leadership and how women in their communities and organizations actually exercise that leadership.

- Ask people to think of a women leader in their communities or organizations; then, in a drawing, have them show how she exercises leadership in her organization or movement. What does her leadership look like?

Facilitation Note: Reassure participants not to worry about being a good artist or not. The idea is to have fun and draw freely, stick figures whatever, and to include the surroundings of the organization or community if so desired. The drawings will be anonymous.

Individually:

- Participants work on their drawings. 15 minutes.

In Plenary:

- Have people hang their drawings on the wall one by one.

Facilitation Note: Since they will be anonymous, you will need to number them for identification purposes.

- To see all the drawings, ask participants to take a gallery walk, walking by the drawings they have created (or view them from their seats depending on the number of participants).
- To encourage reflection and discussion, ask a range of questions to the group and record key ideas. The following are suggestions to start the conversation and generate the analysis:



- Where is the woman leader situated in the drawing? What does her relationship seem to be with the other people in the drawing?
- What ideas come to mind when you look at the drawings?
- What do you like, and don't like, about the drawings?
Facilitation Note: Since these are anonymous, these questions are posed to the entire group. Participants will inevitably have different interpretations of what the drawings reflect. Encourage discussion and emphasize points in common in order to lay the basis for the reflections in buzz groups.

In buzz groups of 2 - 3:

Going deeper, you can probe and continue the analysis with these questions:

- Do the drawings reflect how women leaders actually behave in real life? How they lead?
- Where do we get our ideas about leadership?
- What do these behaviors and ideas say about our leadership challenges?

In plenary:

- Ask for responses from buzz groups on questions above, jotting down on flip chart and emphasizing the main ideas that arise.
- Wrap up: Ask for any final comments or reflections on activity; summarize the points you feel are relevant, for example, highlighting how sexist beliefs shape people's ideas about leadership and gender roles and that male models of leadership predominate with their top down, hierarchical values and approaches, pointing out the challenges these models present for people interested in building more collaborative and collective feminist leadership. Refer back to the **Mural of Mentors** for some of the qualities and skills we want aspire to as we create new approaches and the fact that feminists have been working on developing more collaborative, creative and dynamic forms of leadership for some time. For further study, can recommend writings by Srilatha Batliwala – *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation* – and Hope Chigudu – *Building Organizations with Souls*.

Facilitation Note: Depending on when this exercise takes place, it might be useful to refer back to the power framework in order to affirm how our leadership relates to the different kinds and uses of power: over, within, with, to, for. Also to remember how people's personal lives are not separate



from their public lives; how leadership has to do with our own feelings of well-being, self-worth and self-respect – how we feel inside ourselves, within our families, and in the community.

This exercise can be complemented by various options that help you further deepen participant learning and apply that learning to people's real lives as leaders. Here are three:

- o **Option 1:** This drawing activity can be repeated at a later date in order to compare how participants have changed their ideas or perceptions of the way leadership is exercised and how they want to exercise it. Once new drawings have been sketched, the drawings from the first session are hung up and each person is asked to find her original drawing, compare it with the new one, and undertake a critical reflection, adapting some of the same questions from the original activity.
- o **Option 2:** If this topic will not be revisited at a later date, the facilitator can continue the exercise by discussing aspects of the power framework in order to consider how our leadership relates to the different kinds and uses of power – e.g. power over, within, with, to, for – and by referring to the qualities from the Mural of Mentors activity; with this background in mind, everyone draws what they consider to be a good leader. The drawings are shared in plenary, comparing them to some of the problematic sexist visions of leadership in the earlier part of the exercise. The session ends with a final reflection on the importance of seeing our leadership as a never-ending human process in which we always need to be open to improving and learning in collaboration with other women, challenging each other to be our best.
- o **Option 3:** If you feel participants have enough information, you can have them do an exercise that helps them reflect on their own leadership qualities and skills and develop a personal improvement plan. A simple form (like the one suggested below) is distributed to participants so that they can begin reflecting on what they would like to change about how they exercise leadership. This could be done in conjunction with supportive feedback from a facilitator to ensure a more complete assessment since inevitably people have blind spots – sometimes oblivious to their strengths or to their weaknesses. They should then keep the form and refer back to it periodically in order to assess progress or introduce new ideas.



MY PERSONAL PLAN TO IMPROVE MY LEADERSHIP

NAME: _____

WHAT I NEED TO IMPROVE	WHAT I WILL DO TO IMPROVE	WHAT I NEED	WHO CAN HELP ME